

County has small-town approach to social interaction

By GREGG HERRINGTON
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The daily gatherings of the Osprey Walking Group are as much about social interaction and networking as they are about aerobic exercise.

The Ospreys are one of many informal groups that meet regularly around Clark County in the modern equivalent of the old public square, where small-town America gathered to share news and build relationships.

The venues include country clubs, lodges, churches, schools and offices. But this is a look at a few less-structured gathering spots. For example:

Osprey Walking Group: It was 1988 when Jack Grigsby, Velma Wysong and Jim Golladay decided that if daily walks are good, then daily walks with other people would be better.

Out of that grew the informal group of about 50 retirees who start out at 8 a.m. sharp every weekday from the parking lot at Lacamas Park in Camas.

Their only rule is they have no rules. "There's lots of talking and visiting," said Lew Carlson, 78, a retired Crown Zellerbach researcher. "There are a number of widows in the group. It's really good for them to be able to meet and talk."

The oldest member is Winnie Shinn of Camas, who turns 88 on Feb. 27.

When they finish, some gather at the nearby Lakeside Chalet for coffee.

When a regular has an 80th birthday, the walkers have a party. At Christmas, someone organizes a dinner, all optional, of course.

If someone in the group is in need, they lend a hand, such as providing rides to a woman who needed to visit her daughter in the hospital.

Coffee & pastry: Long before Starbucks stores began popping up in Clark County, there was Java House.

It opened in 1991 at East Evergreen Boulevard and Columbia Street in Vancouver and serves as a haunt for downtown office workers, Hough-area residents and Saturday walkers and bikers.

Another is Season's Coffee Shop in Ridgefield, which Don and Earleen



JEREMIAH COUGHLAN/The Columbian

Retired and semiretired seniors have formed an informal association they call the Osprey Walking Group. There are no dues or officers. They meet weekday mornings at Lacamas Lake Park and take off promptly.

Griswold opened five-plus years ago in the lobby of the old Liberty Theater.

But one of the real senior citizens of the genre is the Donut Nook at 4403 N.E. St. Johns Blvd., which Phil Pomeroy and his wife, Sue Flett-Pomeroy, opened in 1976.

"This is a social hangout," said Phil, nodding toward five retired men sharing family snapshots at their usual spot at the counter.

Across the room, a half-dozen former military men on sofas swapped stories and mock insults at each other's branch of the service.

"Some customers show up at 6 every morning for coffee and doughnuts and play cribbage for a couple of hours or more," Pomeroy said. "Their wives like us because it gives them a place to send their husbands."

Full-service restaurants, like coffee shops, sometimes fill a social role as well.

Fatty Patty's in Battle Ground, owned by Marla Anderson, is a popular



TROY WAYRYNEN/The Columbian

From left: Al Schriener, Donald Polen, Carl Pearson and Forrest Hutton talk about life at the Donut Nook.

gathering place for school bus drivers, contractors, a Bible study group and retirees.

"We definitely have our regulars," Anderson said. "If we don't see one of them for a few days, we call their house to see if they're in the hospital."

Two other cafes filling a social niche

are Rosies, 6331 E. Mill Plain Blvd., in Vancouver, and Neder's Cafe, 2511 E. St., in Washougal.

Corner taverns — or saloons — have been an escape and a social outlet for more than a century. But the sports bar, with full kitchens and big-screen TVs, is a relatively recent spinoff.

Buzz's Sports Bar and Grill at 705 S.E. First St. in Battle Ground is so chummy customers compare it to the tavern in the "Cheers" TV show.

Others of the genre include Hot Shots at 11808 N.E. Fourth Plain Road and the Sports Page, 8052 E. Mill Plain Blvd.

Hangouts favored by teens include the mall and libraries, Marshall Recreation Center in Vancouver and ROCKSOLID Community Teen Center at Bethel Lutheran Church in Brush Prairie. Some restaurants and coffee shops serve the purpose well, with the downtown Vancouver Denny's, almost any Shari's restaurant and some Starbucks.